

THURSDAY, 12TH OCTOBER, 1905.

Mr. Stringer said that on further consideration the Post and Telegraph Department had decided not to withdraw the sixth charge against Willis, and he would therefore request its reinstatement. Mr. Fisher was currently reported in the newspapers as having said that Willis gave him the information in December, 1904, whereas Willis said the first communication was after Mr. Fisher's election to the House this year.

The Board saw no objection to the reinstatement of the charge, provided Mr. Willis was not prejudiced thereby.

On the request of Mr. Joynt, the matter was left in abeyance until 2 p.m. to enable Mr. Joynt to consult his client.

Examination of THOMAS WALTER WEST—*continued*.

Witness qualified statements made previously. He did not tell Mr. Fisher all he could about the voucher, and he was now certain he did not keep a copy of the affidavit.

(To Mr. Stringer): To the best of his belief, it was early in 1904 that he saw the voucher, and on the 31st July he had had the conversation with Mr. Fisher. He could not swear positively that he had discussed the voucher between those dates; he thought he had done so with Willis and Larcombe. He was not certain that they had discussed it at all. He could not give any date for the discussion, supposing it to have taken place. When speaking to Mr. Fisher in July, 1905, he was speaking of the matter from memory of some twelve or eighteen months back. He was not married, and had not mentioned the voucher to anybody but Larcombe and Willis. Mr. Fisher called at witness's house accompanied by Mr. Taylor and Mr. Willis. The conversation took place at the gate. As near as he could remember this is what took place: Willis came to the door and took witness to the gate, where he introduced him to Mr. Fisher and Mr. Taylor. He had only known these gentlemen by sight before, and had had some official business with Mr. Fisher. He knew they were both members of the House. "Mr. Fisher said, 'Well, West, I know that you know certain facts regarding a voucher which passed through the Christchurch Office for Captain Seddon, and I want to know, if necessary, will you tell all and the truth about it.' I replied that I would. I said I knew a voucher for Captain Seddon had gone through the office. He said: 'Oh, that's all I want to know.' These are the exact words as near as I can remember." Witness continuing, said: These were the exact words, so far as he could remember. They (Messrs. Taylor, Fisher, and Willis) then went away. Mr. Fisher did not ask any more questions, and witness did not give any further details. Mr. Fisher had the information before he spoke to witness. Witness said nothing about date, amount, circumstances of seeing voucher, or, in fact, any details. He thought the next mention of the matter was when Mr. Willis asked him to go to Mr. Salter's office. He thought this was next morning—shortly afterwards, at any rate. He and the others gave Mr. Salter information on which affidavits were made up. Practically he personally had said very little in Mr. Salter's office. Mr. Willis was the "leading star" in the business, and he acted as spokesman. He introduced the other officers, and said he had brought them to make the affidavits. The information given Mr. Salter is contained in the affidavit. Mr. Salter prepared the affidavits in witness's presence; he drafted them from information dictated to him. He (witness) would swear they were not already prepared before he saw Mr. Salter. He drew up this rough copy, but did not read it all over to them. Witness thought Mr. Salter drew up one rough draft from information for all three of them, and then made out afterwards separate affidavits for them individually pieced together from the one originally drawn up. The following day they went back to Mr. Salter's and swore to the affidavits. He had signed two copies. He made no inquiries about the purpose of these affidavits, but inferred one was for Mr. Fisher. He presumed Mr. Fisher wanted the affidavit to make certain the officers would not "go back" on him. He took no trouble to ascertain what the affidavit was to be used for. He left it with Mr. Salter without any instructions. He only inferred what use was to be made of it. He did not know at this time that it had been denied by the Government that any such payment had been made. The position in the House, so far as he knew it, was that Mr. Fisher had asked for information concerning a voucher with a certain number, and that that voucher had turned out to be the Anderson voucher. He knew nothing at this time of the suggestion that the Anderson voucher and the Seddon voucher were the same thing. Mr. Fisher had quoted a number, that number was the Anderson voucher, and it could not possibly be the Seddon voucher. Witness did not know where Mr. Fisher got the number and amount from. He was in utter darkness about the whole matter until Mr. Fisher waited upon him. He did not know that Willis had been in communication with Mr. Fisher. He was ignorant of this fact up to the time of the Auditor-General's inquiry. He thought the affidavit was made on the 3rd August. He had said yesterday that, to the best of his recollection, the voucher was made out to "Captain R. J. S. Seddon." He had omitted the word "Captain" in the affidavit. He knew of no reason for this, except that it was a title. Seddon vouchers were made out for Anderson. At the time the Sneddon voucher was produced they were not appearing in the business, and he did not know of the suggested confusion between the two vouchers. He repeated that he did not know of the suggested confusion when he made the affidavit; as a matter of fact, he did not think there was any confusion.

To the Board: He thought the Sneddon voucher was produced simply and solely in response to the number quoted by Mr. Fisher. His one idea and only motive in making the affidavit was to prove that he was certain he had not made a mistake—any possible mistake—there was nothing definite in his mind. He did not know at this time it had been suggested he had mistaken the Sneddon voucher for the Seddon voucher. He could give no other reason than the one he had suggested for leaving out the word "Captain"—an omission made, he believed, by them all—than the one he had given: that it was a title. They had doubtless thought this unnecessary.